



# Mindful Stress Reduction for Caregivers of Veterans with MS

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# Mindfulness Exercise

1. Since most of you are probably sitting, make sure you are sitting straight and let your shoulders drop. You can put your hands on your knees or beside you with palms up.
2. Close your eyes if you feel comfortable doing so. Or you can focus on a single object.
3. Bring your attention to your belly. Feel it rise or expand gently on the in breath and fall or recede on the out breath.
4. Keep your focus on your breathing. “Be with” each in breath for its full duration, and with each out breath for its full duration as if you are riding the waves of your own breathing.
5. Focus only on the breath. Each time you notice your thoughts and mind wandering from just the breath, notice what it is. What took you away from the breath? Notice it then gently bring your attention back to your belly and the feeling of the breath going in and out.
6. During this time, if your mind wanders a thousand times then your job is to simply bring it back to the breath every time, not matter what it becomes preoccupied with.
7. When you feel ready, simply open your eyes.
8. Notice how you feel.

# Mindfulness Exercise

- How did you feel during the exercise and how it makes you feel now?
- Why do you think this exercise is called “mindfulness”?
- What do you think mindfulness means?
- I’m wondering when you think you could make time to do this exercise for 10 or 15 minutes each day?
- How do you think this exercise could help you with stress?

# Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

## **MBSR** (Kabat-Zinn)

- Reduces stress, increased energy
- “Mindful”
  - self-acceptance
  - listening to & honoring your body
  - exploring limits lovingly, gently, respectfully
- Improved mindfulness, stress, anxiety, psychological well-being (Carmody; Gard)
- linked to decreased levels of the stress hormone cortisol
- lower blood pressure.
- improve sleep and reduce chronic pain and gastrointestinal irritations.
- assist with the treatment of depression, anxiety, addiction and other conditions.

# Mindfulness

- Evidence-based benefits in health and mental health care
- “...paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.”
- conscious direction of awareness
  - focus on breath, existence of thoughts, sounds, other sensations

(Kabat-Zinn)

# Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

## VA MBSR Programs and Studies with Veterans

- Helps PTSD, pain, depression, anxiety, other
- MSCOE study - submitting grant for Veterans with MS
- Puget Sound Health Care System: MBSR program for Veterans

(Kearney & Simpson, 2012)

# MBSR: What is it?

- 8-week training
- 3 hour classes weekly
- “homework” for home mindfulness practice
- Day-long group meditation retreat

# Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

- Caregivers at increased risk of emotional stress, depression, illness.
- MBSR study with 20 caregivers
- Psychological assessments/blood sample before and after classes
- Effective for reducing caregiver stress.

(Bloom, et al, 2012)

- The Balance Study: compared MBSR with an education program
- Randomized 78 caregivers of dementia
- 8-weekly session and home practice
- MBSR more effective
- Improved overall mental health
- Reduced stress, anxiety, depression
- Reduced burden
- Improved social support

(Whitebird, et al, 2012)



# Mindfulness is...

- Coming back into the present moment.
- The easiest way to do it is to reconnect with the breath or come down into the body.
- Caregiving is long-term stress.
- Caregivers are never at rest and driven by the To-Do list
- Mindfulness works to inhibit the stress response.

[Joan Griffiths Vega](#), a practitioner and teacher of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) runs a mindfulness stress-reduction workshop specifically for caregivers at Mt. Sinai Hospital and studied Jon Kabat-Zinn's program.

<http://www.vnsny.org/caregivers/care-for-the-caregiver/practicing-mindfulness-to-relieve-caregiver-stress/>

# Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

Caregivers - Understand You Have A Choice in how you respond to stress.

**S.T.O.P.** exercise:

**S: Stop** what you are doing for a moment.

**T: Take a breath.** Concentrate on the flow of your breath in and out.

**O: Observe your thoughts, feelings and physical state.**

- Notice your thoughts and let them be or pass.
- Name your emotions.
- Notice your body, its posture. Are you hungry or thirsty? Do you have any aches or pains?

**P: Proceed with something that will be helpful to you.**

- Find a friend to talk to.
- Eat a nutritious snack or meal
- Stretch to relieve body tension.

# Living mindfully can...

- Help you be more attuned to life's pleasures and appreciate them
- Help you be more engaged with people and in activities
- Give you a tool to deal with life's troubles
- Be incorporated into any task or activity,

(Griffiths Vega, 2016)

# Living Mindfully can help Caregivers...

Bring yourself back into self-care and do things to reconnect you...

- Listen to music
- Have dinner with friends
- Take a walk
- Sit down and pet your cat or dog

What do you do to reconnect yourself?

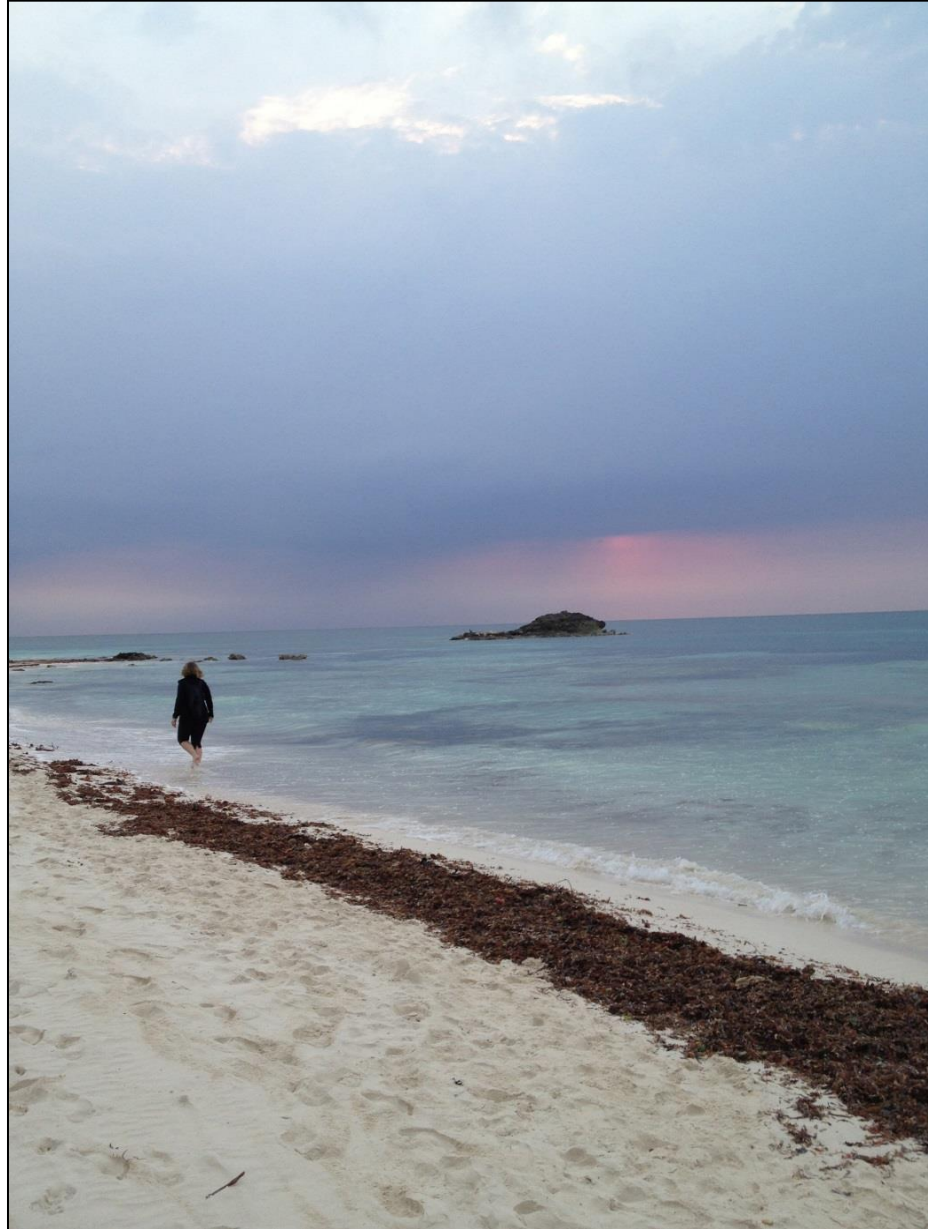
# Breathe out that Stress!



# Breathing Exercise

- Take a deep breathe.
- Hold it for 3-5 seconds.
- Then blow it out as fast as you can.
- Repeat a couple of times until you feel better

# Walking meditation



Alicia's sunrise walking meditation, Yoga Retreat at Maya Tulum, Mexico, Photo by co-yogi Jennifer Miller, May 2013.

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# Online Resources

## Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction

- NMSS Mindfulness: [www.nationalmssociety.org/About-the-Society/News/Study-Suggests-Meditation-Improves-Quality-of-\(1\)?feed=AllNationalNews](http://www.nationalmssociety.org/About-the-Society/News/Study-Suggests-Meditation-Improves-Quality-of-(1)?feed=AllNationalNews)
- VA Mobile App: [www.ptsd.va.gov/public/materials/apps/mobileapp\\_mindfulness\\_coach.asp](http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/materials/apps/mobileapp_mindfulness_coach.asp)
- VA Mindfulness Treatment: [www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treatment/overview/mindful-PTSD.asp](http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treatment/overview/mindful-PTSD.asp)
- VA Mindfulness App: [www.ptsd.va.gov/public/materials/apps/mobileapp\\_mindfulness\\_coach.asp](http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/materials/apps/mobileapp_mindfulness_coach.asp)

## Free Online Mindfulness Courses

Palouse Mindfulness: [palousemindfulness.com/selfguidedMBSR.html](http://palousemindfulness.com/selfguidedMBSR.html)

The Free Mindfulness Project: [www.freemindfulness.org/home](http://www.freemindfulness.org/home)

UC Los Angeles: <http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22>

UC San Diego: <http://health.ucsd.edu/specialties/mindfulness/programs/mbsr/Pages/audio.aspx>

# Studies

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3. Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness. New York, New York: Bantam Dell.
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5. Kearney, D.J., McDermott, K., Malte, C., Martinez, M., & Simpson, T.L. (2012). Association of Participation in a Mindfulness Program With Measures of PTSD, Depression and Quality of Life in a Veteran Sample. *J Clin Psychol* . 68, 1–16. DOI: 10.1002/jclp.20853.
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